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SUBJECT: UPPING THE ANTE ON MIGRATION IN MOROCCO:SUB-SAHARANS

REF: A) 05 Casablanca 1052
B) Casablanca 0135

¶1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: The GOM insists that the number of Moroccan and sub-Saharan migrants attempting to cross illegally into Europe has decreased significantly in the last 18 months. The Ministry of the Interior (MIO) estimates that the number of attempts dropped by more than 60 percent in 2006. This year to date, they claim numbers are continuing to fall. Despite these decreases, the number of immigrants endeavoring to reach the Spanish coast, Canary Islands, the two Spanish enclaves in Northern Morocco remains very high and with increasingly deadly results. Since Spanish-Moroccan sea patrols have tightened the blockade of traditional routes across the Mediterranean and Atlantic, migrants are forced to attempt longer and more dangerous paths to the EU resulting in possibly thousands of deaths a year. In addition to the dangers at sea, the clandestine migrants also face more challenges in Morocco as they await their opportunity to migrate to the EU. This is part I of II - next cable will address the increasing problem of Moroccan minors migrating to Europe. End Summary.

Patrolling the Waters and the Wilderness

¶3. (U) Early in 2007, Governor of Migration and Border Monitoring in the Interior Ministry, Khalid Zerouali, announced that the number of illegal migration attempts from Morocco to EU had fallen 65 percent in the previous year due mainly to joint Moroccan-Spanish maritime patrols. Subsequently, in July 2007, speaking at a Moroccan-Spanish working group on migration, Zerouali said that as of January 2007 Morocco's surveillance systems had prevented between 80,000 and 100,000 foreigners from entering Morocco illegally on their way to the EU. As confirmation of Zerouali's statement, at the same conference, Consuelo Rumi, Spain's Secretary of State in Charge of Migration, congratulated Morocco on its advancements in border security measures. She remarked that the number of pateras

(makeshift boats) arriving in Spain had plummeted by 56 percent last year, thanks in part to its neighbor to the south.

¶14. (SBU) The system of fighting illegal migration in Morocco includes not only the above mentioned maritime patrols but border surveillance systems and periodic sweeps of known gathering points for clandestines as well. According to some indigenous and international NGOs, however, the sweeps conducted by Moroccan security forces are violent and often result in migrants being dumped in the Algerian desert with no food, water or shelter.

According to Louis d'or Ngala, president of Refugees Without Borders (RSF), a Moroccan NGO, this year Moroccan police destroyed dozens of makeshift camps that had housed thousands of sub-Saharanas waiting their opportunity to cross into one of the two Spanish enclaves in Northern Morocco or take the treacherous trip across open waters of the Mediterranean. Ngala reported that these sweeps are often accompanied with killings, physical abuse and a one way ticket to the desert.

¶15. (SBU) The most recent sweep, on September 17, rounded up 441 sub-Saharanas and 262 Algerians in the forests outside Nador, close to the Spanish enclave of Melilla. The following two days saw sweeps in the Western Saharan city of Laayoune which resulted in the arrest of over 70 sub-Saharanas. Their fate is currently unclear. Laura Lungarotti, of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), who works closely with the GOM on voluntary repatriation, speculates that most of those rounded up will be expelled across the border and only a few, if any, will be repatriated voluntarily to their country of origin. She claims that the majority will make a second or third attempt to enter the EU either by land route to Melilla and Sebta, or more likely, by sea to the Canary Islands.

¶16. (SBU) The impact of these sweeps, a common occurrence since the storming of the enclaves in October 2005 (ref A), has been a redistribution of the clandestine migrant population within Morocco.

Two years ago the majority of clandestine migrants in route to Europe were found in the forested areas around the two enclaves. Since then, according to UNHCR office director Johannes van der Klaauw, the migrant population, estimated in 2005 to be approximately 10,000, has relocated to Casablanca and Rabat. Pastor David Brown, of the French Protestant Church of Morocco, has been working with sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco for three years and recently told poloff that he believes the current figures for sub-Saharanas are closer to 20,000. He claims the majority of these clandestine live in Rabat as oppose to Casablanca, where costs are prohibitive.

Violence Not a Thing of the Past

¶17. (SBU) In a July 31 roundup in Laayoune, two sub-Saharanas were reportedly shot and killed by Moroccan security forces in what the official Moroccan press called a foiled immigration attempt. The report said that a group of sub-Saharanas tried to break through Laayoune's security system. The security forces responded by firing "warning shots" over the heads of the clandestine migrants, killing two and wounding two others. The press reported that 26 were arrested in addition to those killed and wounded while 6 managed to escape. According to Ngala, the incident, similar to those of October 2005, received little press and no international attention because it occurred out of sight of EU territory. Ngala claims those captured during the roundup were beaten and dumped in the desert on the Mauritanian border with no provisions.

Deadly Dilemma - New Routes Cost Lives

¶18. (U) Despite claims that the overall number of clandestine migration attempts are down, NGOs and some Spanish officials assert that death tolls are increasing. Spanish officials in the Canary Islands claimed that approximately 6000 African intending migrants died while attempting the dangerous crossing to the Canaries in ¶2006. The reason for the skyrocketing number of deaths, many speculate, is a direct result of the increased maritime patrols

between Morocco and the archipelago. Because of the blockade, intending migrants are forced to find alternate, more dangerous routes to their destination, departing from further south in the Western Sahara, Mauritania or Senegal. The boats that continue to take the risky route from Laayoune to the Canaries are fewer but so overcrowded that the likelihood of capsizing or sinking during the voyage has substantially increased.

¶ 19. (SBU) A similar situation has begun to emerge in the Mediterranean as well. On September 17, the Spanish press reported that pateras coming from Morocco reached the shores of the Valencia region for the first time. The report said that during the previous weekend 56 immigrants were intercepted, including 20 minors. They also reported that four empty boats, each capable of ferrying dozens of people, have been found in the same area. Spanish Civil Guards reported that they had been expecting this shift in routes for some time and had arranged for additional funding to increase security measures which have not yet but put into place.

Comment

¶ 10. (SBU) Comment: Morocco has clearly demonstrated its commitment to fight illegal migration on all fronts, much to the satisfaction of the EU. Its recent accord recognizing the UNHCR (ref B) was a significant step in acknowledging the legitimate presence of some sub-Saharan in Morocco. In addition, the GOM has been working closely with the EU on approaches to increase legal labor migration across the Mediterranean, eliminating the need for some to enter Europe clandestinely in search of informal employment. However, it is increasingly clear that Morocco must continue to develop a more humanitarian system of dealing with sub-Saharan clandestine migrants already in the country. In addition it needs to develop systems to identify trafficked as opposed to economic migrants and treat them accordingly.